

HERMON BAKER



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HERMON BAKER

Hermon Baker has operated a bead store, Yone, in San Francisco's North Beach for over 40 years. He was trained in design and met his business partner Yone through another Japanese artist. Providing the Beats, the Flower Children and creative souls with a source of ingredients for imaginative jewelry making, Hermon has talked to them all.





Hermon, in the 1950's at Sueko



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YONE'





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[In this interview Hermon Baker, explains how he came to San Francisco, his early childhood and schooling, and the creation of a life long partnership with Yonemitsu Arashiro and his sister Sueko. Together, they operated a designer dress shop and eventually a bead store in the North Beach district since the 1960's.]

Hermon Baker

VALERIE HEARN: This is Valerie Hearn interviewing Hermon Baker in San Francisco on April 20th, 2006. So tell me where you were born and what your early life was like.

HERMON BAKER: Well, I was born in Flint, Michigan in 1923 and, of course, Flint is a very industrial town and it was a busy town in those days. I think I remember my early years better than I do my later ones, particularly when I was around 6. It was a very pleasant city from my point of view, anyway.

VALERIE: What made it pleasant for you?

HERMON: Well, I just found it fascinating. I always find things fascinating, even the ordinary things. But my early life was a little disrupted. I remember when I first started going to school in the kindergarten and 1st grade it was very pleasant. School was only two blocks away from our home. But then, unfortunately, The Depression came and my father lost the house and we moved in with my grandfather. It was very hard going for a number of years because there were probably ten of us that lived in this little house. We just bunched up and put up with the inconvenience, so to speak. But after my aunt and uncle moved somewhere else things slowly calmed down and I grew up. I seemed to get along very nicely.

VALERIE: So you grew up in that house with your grandparents?

HERMON: Yes. Well, with my grandfather. My grandmother had died earlier, before I was born actually. But I remember it as being very pleasant. You see, I lived only about six or eight blocks from the center of town so I was near the downtown area and I've always considered myself to be a city boy because I'm used to being in the center of things. And, of course, being in San Francisco you can see how it's just continued.

VALERIE: That's for sure. You're right in the center of things.

HERMON: Well, I always liked to be within a few blocks of downtown because I enjoy being where things are happening. I don't want to participate in them but I like to be around where things are happening.

VALERIE: So you graduated from high school in Flint?

HERMON: In Flint, yes.

VALERIE: And then what happened?

HERMON: Well, then I went to Assumption College in Windsor, Ontario for a couple of years, I went to college there for two years before I was drafted into the Army. But I spent several years there in the Detroit area and in Windsor and I had a very interesting

time there because there are all sorts of things. It was a very bustling city at that time; it was a very busy city.

VALERIE: What were you studying in Windsor?

HERMON: What you call – liberal arts. I don't think I really knew what I was doing, what I wanted in those days. I went in the Army at that point and after I got out of the Army I went to school in Ann Arbor, Michigan at the University of Michigan. By that time I had a little better idea what I wanted to do. I decided I wanted to be a designer but I don't know how clear I was on the concept at that time even. When you're young you don't really get that much of a grasp of things. [chuckle] But after I graduated from Ann Arbor then --

VALERIE: So you got a degree in design?

HERMON: Yes. It was probably one of the few years that they gave that degree. It was the School of Architecture and Design and they give a degree in arts now and with a design of a particular type. I took courses in theater arts and interior designing but I really became much more fascinated with theatre. And I participated in some of the theatrical productions there and I worked on the sets and on the productions. So I sort of shopped around.

VALERIE: Sounds normal.

HERMON: Well, it was. I was utterly fascinated by the theatre. You get a much different perspective of theatre when you watch it from the back stage and actually participate. I mean after you've gone through a couple of weeks of preparing for the show and then go through the performance cycle and see the performance every night and actually have a hand in keeping it going; I became quite interested. So I think I like the background. That's why I like to be in downtown, I think, all that time, I can see what the background is. I'm a woodwork guy. I like to be in the woodwork and see what's going on. Every once in a while I'm forced out and I have to --

VALERIE: Like now.

HERMON: Like now. [laughter] So I'm basically a pretty private person. It's only recently that I've loosened up enough so that I can talk without too much self-consciousness because I've always been very self-conscious. The funny thing about it is I've always considered myself – I was always a little embarrassed by the fact that I seem a little too self-absorbed and too concerned about myself. "Selfish" I believe is the word that was used in the old days. But then the Nineties came along and suddenly everybody was self-absorbed. [chuckles] I guess I'm just like everybody else after all. [laughter]

VALERIE: So there you were at Michigan and you graduated. What did you do then?

HERMON: Well, I came to San Francisco.

VALERIE: And how did you decide to come to San Francisco?

HERMON: Well, it's a very funny story. I used to love to go to Detroit on weekends and I met a very interesting guy who worked for United Airlines and he and his wife were from San Francisco and a couple of times they invited me over for supper. They lived in this very charming apartment on the Detroit River. It was a very bucolic kind of scene, there were lots of trees and it was always very – even though it was downtown - it was quite secluded. It was like being in the country downtown, like Telegraph Hill. But it was so interesting because they had candlelight and wine. So I guess I had this idea that that's the way they lived in San Francisco, very elegant. Well, that was it.

VALERIE: So you decided just to come here?

HERMON: Well, yes. Yes. I spent a few years here and I was not completely happy here. I had a few odd jobs and eventually I moved to Monterey. So I lived in downtown Monterey for about a year and a half. In the meantime they had started a semi-professional theater in Ann Arbor, Michigan and so for about four or five years I would spend part of the winter designing sets for the Arts Theatre in Ann Arbor.

VALERIE: And living here?

HERMON: Well, I lived here and then during the wintertime I would go back to Michigan and work in the theatre there. They did about six productions every winter so that kept me busy and I was fascinated with the theatre. I got involved in the theatre down in Monterey at the Wharf Theatre. But it's one of those things, you know, you really don't – it's hard to make money doing that sort of thing. Of course, one thing I guess I've not paid too much attention to is money. [laughter] Something we should pay a great deal of attention to! That was then and this is now. But I loved Monterey. As a matter of fact, I almost wish I'd stayed there but it just wasn't practical. Once in a while you have to be practical. [laughter]

VALERIE: So you did that for four or five years and then what did you do?

HERMON: Well, it was very interesting because there was a friend of mine that lived next-door to me and he brought me up to San Francisco. He had some business to do in Chinatown with one of the Oriental dealers there and I agreed to come up with him just to see what San Francisco was like then. So he took me to a friend of his, a fellow by the name of Nobuo Kitagaki and he had an apartment there on Romolo Place. He had a really fascinating way of activity there because every night was open house. It was a potluck sort of thing, everybody that you knew came by; they brought their share of the dinner and the wine, so it was a very Bohemian.

VALERIE: Where is that?

HERMON: Romolo Place runs from Broadway to [Vallejo], it goes up about two blocks.

It's the first alley there on Broadway east of Columbus Avenue.

VALERIE: So it's right in the neighborhood.

HERMON: Oh, it's right in the neighborhood. It's just a block off of Broadway and a block off of Grant Avenue. So that was my introduction to North Beach.

VALERIE: What did you think about it?

HERMON: Well, it seemed very comfortable. You see, when I first came to San Francisco I lived over on Washington Street and Fillmore. I was really quite perplexed when I first came here because I had assumed it was going to be warmer here and I hadn't counted on the dampness. It took me years to get used to the dampness. It's really quite foggy out in that neighborhood. It's a different matter down here downtown. Anything the other side of Van Ness or Fillmore, certain times of the year, certainly summertime, it's really quite cold out there. You don't see that much sun. So I was a little perplexed by that and that's one of the reasons that Monterey seemed rather more attractive. Monterey's more of a sunny town, quieter and more pleasant and I was right downtown. [laughter] But eventually I decided to come back to San Francisco and I worked for a couple of years with Kitagaki. His father made shojis. Those are screens, the Japanese shoji screens. They had a workshop there at the corner of Union and Grant Avenue. Kit also displayed his collages in what he called the Tokanoma Gallery.

VALERIE: What year was this?

HERMON: Well, it was a couple of years before the Street Fair. I don't know exactly when it was. The Street Fair was about fifty years ago so – 1954. I think

VALERIE: So in the Fifties?

HERMON: Yes.

VALERIE: What did you do for him? Did you do design work?

HERMON: No, we just worked – helped him make the shojis. I worked there, oh, for a short time, I worked there for about six months and at that point I became acquainted with Yone (Yonemitsu Arashiro) and his sister Sueko who were running the shop where I am right now. So, I started working for them and one thing led to another so I'm still here. [laughter] Unfortunately, both of them are not here but that's the way things go. I guess I'm just a survivor.

VALERIE: How did you make that decision to start working with them?



Yone, 1963

Photograph by Imogen Cunningham
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HERMON: Well, I wasn't doing anything that was very interesting when I was working with Kitagaki. It was interesting but it wasn't that interesting. It was just something to do and keep busy.

VALERIE: And you found beads more interesting?

HERMON: Well, beads don't come into play for another seven or eight years.

VALERIE: So what were you doing then?

HERMON: Well, we sold mostly imports from Japan. Yone and another fellow, Bill Wilson, for a number of years they designed clothes. They designed quite a few clothes. We had quite a few customers; people that they had designed garments for.

VALERIE: Would they make the garments there as well?

HERMON: We had a couple of seamstresses that worked with us. Part of the reason we got off into the beads is that – in those days clothes were much more fitted than they are now and it seemed as though there was an awful lot of fitting going on. [laughter] At some point I guess we decided that the only people who were making money were the seamstresses. [laughter] So when the beads came along we grabbed it.

VALERIE: How did the beads come along?



Hermon, advertising the Upper Grant Avenue Art Fair

HERMON: Well, it's very funny. This is when the Flower Children started coming to town and they loved beads and things like that so we decided, "Well, let's do it!" We might as well try it anyway. So we made a trip down to L.A. and bought some beads and we sold them. Then Yone started searching through Chinatown to see if he could find beads and he found Peking glass beads there which he bought and sold in the shop. It's kind of amusing when you think about it because some of these beads are now considered to be antiques and really quite valuable. But in those days, to people in Chinatown it was just a lot of goods that they had been stuck with for many years. Most of them were brought in for the Panama-Pacific Exposition and it was a bit of a flop financially. So when Yone came by in the Fifties and wanted to buy the beads, they were very eager to sell them to him. He got to know a lot of people there and he spent a lot of time going through all the basements of Chinatown. It was amazing the things he found there. It was really quite fascinating because usually people don't get a chance to go – because many of the buildings are connected by tunnels, you see. There's an underground tunnel system in Chinatown. Most people aren't aware of that.

VALERIE: Did you go too?

HERMON: Oh, no, I didn't.

VALERIE: He just told you about it.



Yone 1, 1963

Photograph by Imogen Cunningham
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HERMON: Oh, yes.

VALERIE: So what were you doing? Were you selling?

HERMON: I was selling in the shop and organizing things and just – I more or less put the shop together. That's where the designing came in.

VALERIE: What was going on around here in the Fifties, do you remember?

HERMON: Oh, yes, I remember very well because we had the Beatniks first, that phenomenon went on for a number of years and that, to me, was a very fascinating period. But again, I knew these people but I really didn't have that much contact with them. I knew who they were.

VALERIE: Can you remember any of their names? There must be people that are still around.

HERMON: Well, they are. The only name I remember is a fellow by the name of Brautigan who used to live above the Laundromat next-door and he became a very famous writer.

VALERIE: How about Ferlinghetti?

HERMON: Well, we met Ferlinghetti. Actually, we knew Shig Marau (sp.?) who worked with him and helped him set up the bookstore. He was a Japanese fellow that knew Yone very well. Most of the people I met in those days, I met through Yone. He knew everybody or seemed to know everybody.

VALERIE: Did you know Peter Macchiarini?

HERMON: Oh, yes, as a matter of fact I knew him very well. I used to live over his store at one point so I got to know him very well, yes.

VALERIE: And Rhoda Pack.

HERMON: Rhoda Pack and all the people that were there on the street (ed. Grant Ave.). I knew Wolo the clown (ed. Puppeteer and writer), Gretchen McAllister, Paul Gee, the jeweler, and Gene Wright, the photographer. I have a very hazy memory of these people. I don't think I found them that fascinating, they talked too much. As a matter of fact, the joke I have – I used to go to the Trieste when it opened and I went there for a number of years. I haven't been back for forty years now.

VALERIE: [laughter] Why not?

HERMON: Well, because you couldn't go in there and sit down and have a cup of coffee without getting into a conversation or an argument with somebody. People loved

to argue in those days, you know. They'd get very opinionated and they'd ask your opinion and you'd tell them and then they'd say – you'd end up with a fight. [laughter] So when I say, "have a cup of coffee," I just wanted to have a cup of coffee and maybe a little conversation but I didn't want to have a confrontation every time I went in there. The place that was much more comfortable was a place that was called The Co-existence Bagel Shop. It was only there for about a year or so and eventually it moved over to Berkeley, I don't know whether it even carried on after that. But it was a very interesting place. It was sort of like a coffeehouse, but they served a little bit of food there. Again, that was one of the places. Then there used to be a Grant Ave. bar between Union and Vallejo, it was called The Place. They did a lot of poetry reading and that sort of thing there. As a matter of fact, I even cooked food there for a couple weeks one time. I was not that good a cook but it was ordinary stuff.

VALERIE: And why did you do that?

HERMON: Well, it was something to do in the evening. It was kind of interesting to see these people. So I saw these people poetry reading and ranting and giving their opinions and all this sort of thing. There was a lot of that. It was a big deal for expressing yourself. At that time I was not into expressing myself and I wasn't that interested in other people expressing themselves either. [chuckle] But it was a heck of a lot of activity going on in those days. The depressing part of it was you had all these young people coming to town. They were almost like lost people looking for something, running away from home. You'd see these people that were very young and very

attractive and very sweet and within a month they looked like something the cat had dragged in. They just let themselves go, drank too much and just got carried away, I guess. So it was rather depressing to see that going on. It's the underside. You see both sides. You see them coming in very young and attractive and beautiful and after six months they're not beautiful anymore, they suddenly get a little hardened. The best example of that was the gal that ran a place called Miss Smith's Tearoom. It sounded very genteel and elegant but it was the opposite.

VALERIE: Where was this?

HERMON: It was right next to Figoni Hardware. The Lost and Found Saloon is in there now. But that's where she started this little bar. Boy, she turned from a beautiful sweet young thing to a hard-bitten - Boy, she was a hard one. Over a period of a year, the transformation was unbelievable. So that's the part – a lot of things I remember and a lot of things I'd rather forget because there were a lot of people that came and expressed themselves but they paid a pretty high price for it. For instance, now, Mr. Brautigan, he seemed to have a lot of friends but I found him rather disagreeable myself. He eventually made a lot of money, he wrote a number of books, bought himself a ranch in Montana, bought a house in Bolinas and blew his brains out. So that's the side of it that I try to forget. It isn't something you can forget really. Right now there's this big business of remembering the Beats and all that sort of thing but I remember both sides. They weren't here that long, you know, a couple years. They were here and then suddenly they became famous or notorious like Coke Infante. The

tourists started looking for them and so they got the hell out of here. [laughter] So then the Flower People, the Flower Kids, came in. So that was the second wave.

VALERIE: During the time of the Beats, what was the neighborhood like? Do you remember the places that were here?

HERMON: Oh, I remember them. There was this wonderful Italian restaurant there where the Savoy-Tivoli is right now. There used to be an old Italian restaurant there and there was a bocce ball court in the back. It was an old-fashioned Italian restaurant in North Beach. Now you see, when I first came here it was very inexpensive to live and it was very quiet. The first restaurant I ever ate in was The New Pisa. As a matter of fact, that was the first meal I ever had in North Beach. It was something like \$3.50 for a full meal with wine and dessert and coffee. So that was the way things were, they were very simple. Then the Beats came and then the Flower Children and then things got a little too interesting.

VALERIE: Where did you live when you first started working with Yone?

HERMON: Well, actually, the three of us lived in the store.

VALERIE: In the store, not above the store, in the store.

HERMON: Yes. I mean we were – things were simple in those days. Eventually, Sue moved into the apartment in the back and when Yone's parents came from Hawaii they lived near Japantown. But we took over the apartment that Mr. Brautigan was in over the Laundromat and so his parents moved in there. Eventually his parents moved into the apartment over the shop and then his parents went back to Hawaii. Then Sue was in the front apartment and Yone and I took over the apartment in the back.

VALERIE: Tell me about Sue. How did she die?

HERMON: Well, it's kind of hard to say because she developed an amazing virulent form of rheumatoid arthritis and through the years she went through a very long painful – about twelve years of searching for some sort of cure or something to alleviate it. She tried the gold treatments. She tried faith healing; all kinds of treatments. Dr. Wenneslend was her doctor for a while, he was one of the more legendary characters. I didn't realize how important he was in those days. I think he was Norwegian. Across the street from Rose Pistola on Stockton Street there's now a restaurant called Manga Rosa. Do you know where that is? He had an office above that in that building there. Sue went to him a number of years; she went to a lot of doctors through the years. She even moved back to Hawaii for a while but she moved back here before she died.

VALERIE: That must have been traumatic.

HERMON: It was a very traumatic period for us. I forgot, when we moved out of the shop we took a flat there on Noble's Alley. At the end of Noble's Alley there was a crazy building and we rented an apartment there. I mean we couldn't stay in the shop; it was a bit too much. [laughter] A lot of our customers we got through friends of Yone's, that knew him and were trying to help him because it wasn't that easy to make money in those days. The beads became quite popular and we had a lot of customers. You used to have to stand in line to get into the place. It was very funny because the neighbors were not very happy about it. I mean these Flower Children were rather outrageously dressed and they [the neighbors] let us know they were not happy with this scene. [laughter] These people were really quite innocent and very sweet. They were sort of like some of the Goths that you see these days. There's an underside there too but basically they're very sweet people that get in over their head and things get more complicated than they ever imagined. We had this young girl that worked for us for a while and for some reason or another a reporter from *The Chronicle* befriended her and got her to spill her guts to them about how it is to be a Flower Child and all that sort of thing. So there was a write-up in *The Chronicle*, a full-page article about her and her problems and the problems of the Flower Children. The last sentence was the one that gave us in the biggest problem. "And she works in a bead store in North Beach." Then the neighbors were really upset. [laughter] It's funny because a lot of the people I know now are people that either were customers that Yone made clothes for or that Yone met. For instance, one of them was a cousin of the guy that ran the Spaghetti Factory, Freddie Kuh, which was the big scene during this period. He also took over that Italian restaurant and turned it into the Savoy-Tivoli. Of course, the Spaghetti Factory was the

place to go and eat. The food was not that good [laughter] but it was a very interesting place. The thing I enjoyed about that place was he had a very good selection of port wine. I think I tried every kind he had there, he must have had about three dozen different kinds of port. A lot of things started there. The flamenco dancers were there for a number of years. The company was called Flamenco De Los Bodegas.

VALERIE: What year was this?

HERMON: Oh, God, this was back in the Sixties, I guess. Then the guy who does the Pocket Opera started there, Donald Pippin. He was in full force, I went to a number of his early productions. And the flamenco dancers. I never got over the fact that the guitar player was Chinese but that's another story. [laughter] We met all kinds of interesting people in those days. One of our close friends was a gal that used to work for the White House, [Department Store]. She was their fashion coordinator and did their fashion shows. We used to help her do her fashion shows up at the Fairmont Hotel and the White House and various places. So we met all kinds of interesting people that way too. After she left the White House she opened a store there on Grant Avenue at Green. Nasimo Sargis was her name. The thing that fascinated me about her was that she was Assyrian. Assyrians are a rather unusual group of people. People don't realize the Assyrians are still in existence. But they lived in what is now Iran and they were persecuted and forced to go to Iraq. The Turks persecuted them. There are three communities here in this country that have a large Assyrian population. One of them is Turlock in California, the other in Chicago, Illinois and the other is Flint,

Michigan where I was born. So it was interesting to meet an Assyrian. I never knew an Assyrian in Flint although I did see a party of Assyrians when I was in Chicago on weekend. Well, she used to have a few little fashion shows there and she was the first one to publicly model Rudi Geinrich's topless bathing suits and that was the beginning of the topless. [laughter] You can see how it happened. Of course, we got to know Carol Doda. She used to stop in the shop all the time on her way to work.

VALERIE: What was she like?

HERMON: Oh, she's a very nice gal, very interesting to talk to.

VALERIE: So there must have been lots of people like that who stopped in the shop.

HERMON: Oh, yes. Yes.

VALERIE: Who else, can you remember?

HERMON: Our most famous customer in those days, of course, was Janis Joplin. She started buying beads from us before she really was discovered. She really is a very sweet thing and she's very quiet and she has a beautiful voice. But you didn't get anywhere being nice in those days, as the way it is now even, even more so now. But she strained her voice. I never saw any of her performances. I've seen her video performance and it doesn't look like the same person. When you see people in their

natural state they're completely different from the way they are on the stage. But she did come in just about a week before she died. She spent an hour in the shop just sitting there talking about the old days.

VALERIE: Do you remember anything about that conversation?

HERMON: No, not really. I wasn't really listening. You know how it is when you're talking, you don't really listen, right, and it wasn't anything important. It was just talk. It's funny with people like that. When she first came in – I mean we didn't see her in the intervening years when she was doing all these performances. We saw her at the beginning and we saw her at the end before she died, so we never saw the in-between. But it was very curious because a couple of years ago when a lot of publicity came out about Janis Joplin this fellow came in the shop and said, "I heard you knew Janis Joplin." We said, "Yes, she used to buy things here." He said, "I wish I had known that because her family was here the other day and I could have had you meet them." But it turned out it was the guy who more or less started her on her way. He started a lot of these musicians of that period on their way. A year or so ago when the apartment upstairs became available he was one of the people that looked at the apartment. Apparently he had some thought of moving into it. I said, "Well, this is amazing." You talk about full circle. But I was really shocked because six months later he died, not a penny in his pocket. They've been having all kinds of benefits for his estate here out at Golden Gate Park. His name was Chet Helms. But you know how it is, you see these

people and you see them in action or you see them before the action and then see them after the action and so you just – I feel like I'm just there. I think I'm the observer.

VALERIE: So let's kind of wind it back a little bit because I'm interested in the evolution of the shop and where you lived. You talked about Yone – the beads he was buying, were from Chinatown.

HERMON: Yes. Yes.

VALERIE: Where did he start getting beads after that?

HERMON: Well, we started buying things in Los Angeles and then New York. And then buying from other places and it just sort of got out of hand. He made trips to New York and I went with him a couple times. It just became a different situation all together.

VALERIE: It sounds like he got really serious --

HERMON: Well, it was. There was a lot of activity in those days and it was a big deal. It's a very curious business because it was more of a phenomenon than a business. It was all part and parcel of the early days of the Beatniks, not the Beatniks but the Flower People. I mean you had all sorts of crazy things like the Beatles walking into the shop and everybody going [imitating excited yelling]. So you see all kinds of strange things like that and you're so busy selling beads you don't have time to see what's going on.

And some of these kids were really quite crazy, you know. I think one of the most interesting – you had people coming in and they'd say, "We want to buy some love beads." I said, "Well, you just pick them up and make a necklace out of them, it's as simple as that." There was no thought of being artistic or – I mean it was just a phenomenon. A couple of very ordinary guys came in one afternoon and they looked rather out of place. They walked up to the counter and said, "We want to buy some love beads." Well, the upshot of it was they apparently were undercover agents and wanted to see what's going on. They wanted to look the part. They were so square, I mean it was funny [laughter]. After you see the real Beatnik, you know, or a real Flower Child, you're going to feel – they're not just ordinary people. They're ordinary people but they become something else. [laughter]

VALERIE: So where all have you lived in the neighborhood? Which particular apartments?

HERMON: When Sue died we moved into her apartment. We lived in the back and Sue lived in the front. She was in the apartment above the shop.

VALERIE: She lived above the shop?

HERMON: Yes. And then he and I lived in the apartment below, in the back. There's a small apartment in a separate building in back.

VALERIE: Then when she died what happened?

HERMON: We took over the apartment then, above the shop, so we've been there ever since.

VALERIE: When did Yone die?

HERMON: He died about thirteen years ago. Again, it was a long period of illness. He was one of these A-type people.

VALERIE: So it was stress?

HERMON: Oh, it was stress, stress, stress all the time and he – I think the third heart attack killed him. He had bypasses. It took Sue twelve years to die and it took him eighteen years.

VALERIE: How old was he when he died?

HERMON: 69. It's very interesting because he had a bypass about four years before he died and I almost regret that he had that bypass. He had four years of life but it wasn't quality.

VALERIE: What was it like?

HERMON: Oh, it was just very – eventually just very debilitating.

VALERIE: So he couldn't do much?

HERMON: Oh, no, no. See, in those days [sigh] – I don't think they knew how to take care of people in that condition. They've learned since then. When you go to the hospital and you're practically at death's door, they do everything they can to keep you alive. They don't want to seem to be helping you along to your death. But that last bypass I think was a mistake because it just prolonged his life. It just delayed the inevitable. I had the feeling that at some point he could have – he should have died. What had happened was when he went to the hospital to have the bypass everything moved like clockwork, it was almost like it was a dream. We had this fantastic view of the Golden Gate out of the room and everything was just moving along like clockwork. [imitating ticking sounds] The doctor came in and looked him over and said, "What's this?" Apparently he had a rash that had never been there before and he didn't know what it was and he wasn't about to do the operation not knowing what it was. It seemed as though it was like the way to go, everything beautiful. So when he did go and have the bypass four months later everything went wrong. It was just the opposite. I mean it was successful but – Every time we went to the hospital it seemed as though we kept bumping into Mama Sanchez who ran Mama's. She had the same problem, she had it in spades. So it was sort of a community. By the way, that place [Mama's] has been there fifty years. It was just an ice cream parlor and they used to make sandwiches for

the kids at St. Peter and Paul's Church. Then they started making these – they'd give you a choice of bread and they started making rather gourmet type sandwiches and that's where it started.

VALERIE: They line up there every morning.

HERMON: I know. That business has gone through a fantastic metamorphosis. They've been up, down, and sideways for fifty years. They had a fantastic restaurant there on Nob Hill for a couple of years. They used to have a restaurant in Macy's, they had one on Geary. So eventually they went back to their roots. [laughter] Of course, the fact that she was in such ill health too, but that's the way it is; people live and die.

VALERIE: So then when Yone died you obviously took over the shop.

HERMON: Yes.

VALERIE: Were you buying beads then? You were doing the whole thing?

HERMON: Yes, yes. It sort of flushed me out of my shell, so to speak. [laughter] I couldn't stay in the woodwork anymore. [laughter] Yes. That's the way it works out; sooner or later they catch up with you.

VALERIE: Did you go on trips to buy beads?



The Yone Store, 2008

HERMON: Oh, no, I didn't do too much by that time. I have to beat salespeople off with a club at this point. It's a seller's market now, it's not a buyer's market.

VALERIE: Really. Because there are so many thousands of beads in your shop!

HERMON: I know that. It's just one of them things.

VALERIE: Do you replenish the stock?

HERMON: I'm not replenishing any now because I'm going to go on the Internet very shortly. I'm joining the real world by going on to the virtual world. Things have gone completely -- back and forth now. In order to get in the real world these days, you've got to go on the Internet, into the virtual world. The real world seems really quite unreal at this point, "virtual" I think is the word.

VALERIE: How?

HERMON: I think it's mostly the Hollywood celebrity influence. People don't act like people anymore. They act like what they've seen other people do. It's as though everybody's doing a production. As a matter of fact, business is a production now. Everything is show business now. Everybody -- they dress up. It all started back in the Sixties, I guess. They wanted to do their thing and when they're doing their thing they're



Yone's, glorious beads, 2008



doing what everybody else is doing. So there's a level of fakery. It isn't insincere, it's real to them but to me it seems quite artificial. People don't live, they do a production, and they put on a show. You just have to go to Mama's and watch these people coming in. I mean everybody's doing a particular routine.

VALERIE: I haven't known you very long but I kind of imagine that you've been the same for many years.

HERMON: Different.

VALERIE: [laughter]

HERMON: I have a feeling that people don't change, they just become themselves.

VALERIE: So do you feel like you've really become yourself?

HERMON: Finally. Actually I'm more comfortable now than I've ever been.

VALERIE: Great. That must be nice.

HERMON: I think it's because I have a sense of reality now that I didn't have before. Before you would see these people going through the routine of being Flower Children or Beatniks or whatever they were doing and now it's become a way of life. I suddenly

realize that people are a lot more complicated than you ever thought they were. What's happened to me, and I think it's only happened in the last three years, that I've gotten a real perspective because I've always been nearsighted all my life and during the last two years before I had the operation on my eyes I was going blind. I actually had glaucoma. It was kind of a shock to me to realize that I could not see color anymore and that I couldn't tell the difference between black and blue. So there are a lot of mistakes I made during that period before I had that operation. I had no sense of color and I really had no sense of reality in a way because I was so nearsighted. So after I had those cataracts removed it was suddenly as if I could suddenly see for the first time and I was really quite shocked because there's a lot of things I never saw. I was really amazed at how ugly people are, not that they were ugly but that you could see everything, every expression, every poor wrinkle. It was like high definition television after you've been watching a really scratchy screen all the time. So that to me was a real shocker. I realized that I had only seen about a fraction of what there is to be seen. See, my eyesight has always been 2200 and 2300 so I mean I was legally blind all my life and I didn't know it. So that re-oriented my life from a realistic point of view. After I suddenly realized I could see then suddenly reality really set in. But then you don't really care at that point. Before you had all these suspicions of what things were like because you couldn't see everything. Of course, I'd walk down the street and there were a lot of people I never even said boo to because I couldn't see them. There was no reason for me to say hi because [laughter] - -

VALERIE: You didn't know who they were.

HERMON: But this is a problem I've had all my life, it's not just now. For instance, I've always been a wool gatherer. It's the reason why I've never driven a car. I learned how to drive a car. My father, after about two months of giving me lessons he suddenly said, "This isn't a good idea." [laughter] So I'm a pedestrian and there's a lot I've lost – a lot I've not seen. It isn't that I've lost it, it's just that I never saw it. You can't lose what you haven't seen. I remember when I was a kid it was a phenomena that sort of startled me because when I was walking to school I would suddenly stop at a corner and I'd say, "I can't remember anything that happened in the last three blocks, it was as if I was on automatic. I mean I stopped for the signals but I have no memory of what happened in the past. This is what sort of startles me now because in the last ten years I've suddenly had a flood of long term memory. Not like short-term memory. And it's only in the last month or so, month and a half – I suddenly saw this ad for a new product that's supposed to improve your short-term memory. I have very good long-term memory. I have total recall of things that happened when I was 6 years old. Things start to fade off after World War II; then things get a little hazy. I remember things but I can't remember dates, names, people, that sort of thing. But I started using this product, it's a food product that apparently they've tested and it's supposed to improve your short-term memory, at least older people. That's what it's aimed at. They seem to be doing a very good business and I'm very impressed with what it's done for me. When you get old things start getting a little hazy and loud noises and a lot of things happening at once can be very confusing. Since I've been taking these pills now for about a month and a half I can actually – I'm aware of the difference. It's comparable to

that cataract surgery sort of thing. I find that I can sort things out a little better. For instance, when I left the shop I picked out your card and when I got to the top of the hill I could still remember your name and your address. Now ordinarily I would look at it and then I'd have to refer to it again when I got up the hill. I guess when you're old and you are alone you have the opportunity to have a more clear view of everything or you have the opposite possibility too. I notice that some old people when they get old and they're alone they get sort of helpless and confused and it's not an option I like to think about. Sooner or later if you find the right detail or right way around that problem – because short-term memory has always been a problem and I can see where I had it even when I was young. I think I got my glasses a little too late because when I was young I used to sit in the front of the class because I couldn't see anything. I was in the 10th grade before I got my glasses. Well, you know, during The Depression they had other problems. I remember when we went to school, we went to this parochial school and the tuition there was three or four dollars for the family, that's the tuition you paid to go to school. I didn't go to the public school. So things were just on a different scale in those days. I can close my eyes and I practically see my entire early life. I can look for it, I remember the houses. I remember the houses more than the people, but it's all gone. It's only in my memory now. I have the same situation in Detroit because I lived there for a couple of years and I went to school there so I got to know the city very well and that's all gone, it's completely gone. It's only there in your memory.

VALERIE: What about this neighborhood? Is it in your memory?

HERMON: It is. I remember a lot of things. For instance, my chief interest in life is food so I remember the first days when I came here, the grocery stores were fascinating to me because there were so many of them. There aren't any left, they're all gone. They're all gone. I remember you used to be able to go – around Green and Columbus - there were probably about six or seven different places you could go to buy things. Some things were better in some places and they were not so good in others so you had a wonderful variety. It was the same with the bakeries, there were bakeries all over the place.

VALERIE: Well, there still are bakeries.

HERMON: Only two – three – four. Well, I don't consider Victoria and Stella on Columbus Avenue to be bakeries because they don't make bread. There's Danilo and the one on the corner there, Italian-French. So those are the only two bakeries left from my point of view. I remember many others now. The only ones I can remember are Cuneo and Dianda (both were in the same building). It used to be over there on Green Street, across from Benedettis. I don't know what it is now but they eventually moved. [editor: Dianda is still operating from its original shop in the Mission.] This one on the corner here at Grant and Union [Italian-French Bakery], it's just sort of a repository, a remains of all the other bakeries. There used to be a lot more – well, there weren't that many restaurants but they were very simple, just ordinary food, nothing pretentious about it.

VALERIE: What restaurants do you like now?

HERMON: Well – I'm sorry you asked that question. [laughter] I still go to the U.S. Café. It's much better than it used to be. I usually go to Moose's. I don't much care for Rose Pistola, it's just too busy and too noisy. Outside of that, there isn't – I go to the Washington Square Bar and Grill for old times' sake once in a while. The restaurants I like the best right now are Moose's and The House. I love The House.

VALERIE: Do you go there very often?

HERMON: Not that often. I don't eat out that much anymore. It's become too much of a hassle and it's not that pleasant and it's more expensive. If you're going to dine out, you might as well go first-class and you can't afford to go first-class every night. Once a week, twice a week, that sort of thing... It seems as though almost any place you go it costs as much as it does anywhere else. I mean you can get mediocre food and pay the same price. Personally, from my point of view, it's all rather mediocre, but I have the benefit of hindsight, I guess. It's the same with theatre and music. I used to go to the symphony and the opera and that sort of thing and the theatre. At some point you say, "It's going downhill, it isn't the same." It isn't that it's less; it's just that it's different and some things, they're not considered to be important. Now the importance is doing violence to whatever it is you're talking about. That, to me, is the essence of it. In other words, if they do a production, they do a production [demonstrating]. They don't do it the way it was written, they do it the opposite way in most cases. So the people that

own these properties now, I can see why they would be upset but, at the same time, they're not the people that wrote the plays or that got the ideas. But these days people don't want to take anything the way it is, they want to make something, they want to add their own little personal take on it. It's a very limited sort of – I think of theatre and music as propaganda at this point because they have either a social viewpoint or an intellectual or an emotional viewpoint or a political one and it's just a production and they beat your head over with their point of view. Well, they stick your nose in it, actually, is what they do. They just rub your nose in it and say, "You like it, don't you?"

[laughter]

[end recording]



Hermon Baker, 2006

A BEEHIVE OF BEADS

By MARY STRAYER

One of the chic-est and most colorful gathering places in town, these do-your-own-thing fashion days, is a tiny shop on Union Street near Grant called "Yone," pronounced Yo-knee.

There you might find Mrs. J.W. Mailliard III seeking the makings of mahara-nee-sized earrings for a sophisticated cocktail bash, elbow to elbow with a bearded man in Frontiersman's hat, jeans and fringed jacket, selecting materials for his craft, "making special necklaces for very special chicks." Teen-agers swarm into the place. So do matrons, including one who makes and sells bracelets with outrageously big stand-up flower adornments.

Socialites, schoolgirls and fashion-conscious elders buy the same things: The simple basics for creating jewelry, and beads, beads, beads.

Yone, a solidly built young man born in Hawaii, and a graduate from art and fashion design schools, is hooked on beads. His passion for globes of crystal, porcelain, wood, metal, name-it-and-he's-got-it, began 10 years or so ago, when Yone found some Peking glass strands to accessorize his custom fashion collections.

Today, the dressmaking part of his business is no more. But his shop is known from here to New York as a gold mine for beads of every size, shape, color and material.

"My dresses were ultra simple, really sort of ahead of their time, too sophisticated for standard gold and pearly type stuff," Yone said, glancing happily at sardine-jammed customers carrying compartmented trays, inspecting the anything-but-standard contents of his dozens of bead bins.

"I put the long Peking glass necklaces with the dresses, knotted flapper style. Pretty soon I became fascinated with all of the other kinds of beads I saw. Trading beads, for instance, which look African or American Indian, but actually made in Europe, to use for barter. Peo-

ple started contacting me, to say they'd found some unusual beads in a back store-room and did I want them. I did, every time. Pretty soon I was too busy with beads to make any dresses."

Earrings are favorite projects of Yone customers. For a dollar or so, one may buy screw-on or pierced-ear bases, plus spools of strong, thin wire for stringing up the decorative portion.

All of his beads aren't regularly shaped globes, by any means: There are colorful rings, East Indian bells, pendants of fine filigree, teardrop and pendant shaped stones, all with holes for stringing. There also are strips of rhinestone and cut steel tiny beads already wired together, which clever fingers can turn into belts or flat necklaces, sometimes adding bead fringe.

"I wore this home-made necklace to a very smart New York restaurant. The matre d' must have thought I was some kind of potentate. I got the best seat in the house," the bead prince chucked.

His visit to Manhattan was to see designers who are demanding his beads for use with one of fall's top moods, the rich hippie look. But – hasn't the hippie thing sort of had it?

It's only just the beginning, and will definitely be in for spring, Yone thinks. We no longer are amused, maybe, by long hair and studiously unorthodox costumes.

But, people with any flair just "aren't going back to stereotyped fashion. It's the era of imagination." Not many people can afford to express themselves in David Webb jewels or even Kenneth J. Lane pieces. For a few dollars and a lot of ingenuity, though, anyone can be her one-of-a-kind jewelry designer. A good New Year's resolution, in fact, might be to get with it as a craftsman, a season divided between ultra chic simplicity and elaborate calls for personality jewelry accents.

SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER



More Than A Bead, Button and Bangle

Often I walked past this tiny shop especially to enjoy the old carved wooden horse in the window. I thought of how splendidly it pranced long ago on a Massachusetts merry-go-round. One day it was gone . . . sold to an Oregon woman who appreciated its age and beauty. I felt bereft. On a recent early Spring morning, I really looked in the window on each side of the unimposing entrance and mentally catalogued the eclectic contents. Sandwiched between a one-stop laundrette and a matte-black garage door, Yone Inc., at 478 Union Street, hardly looks like a resource known to creative women and men throughout the world.

Among the treasures, each longing to tell its story are doll fetish earrings, spirit shield sun catcher, an ancient thermometer which doesn't register temperature but declares, *sic*, "NR to-night tomorrow alright." A beautiful flowered chandelier of glass and crystal hangs in each window. In back of one chandelier, a large celadon teapot is suspended in limbo. Beneath a large, silver colored sculpture which incorporates Christmas ornaments, rhinestones, and an enigmatic face, is a stack of flowered European plates and a Chinese bowl with free-form fish design. Two white ceramic Pillsbury Doughboy-like figures seem no more incongruous than the calipers and knife, too rusted with age to be useful or harmful. A small, motionless carousel rests near a child's dress form which, logically supports several strings of beads. Additional objects in the windows, varying in esteem, are overlooked in a surfeit of loose beads which glitter colorfully in neatly compartmented trays.

BEADS! Big beads, tiny beads. Beads of glass, brass, quartz, granite and tiger eye, silver and ceramic. Beads from Africa, Austria, Czechoslovakia, India, Italy, Peru, the Philippines, Japan, Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the United States. To anyone knowledgeable about beads, Yone is the source, attracting collectors, designers and dabblers from Denmark, France, Switzerland, Boston, Japan, Hawaii and Fremont.

Originally the shop was a co-operative concerned mainly with Japanese crafts. As artisans went in different directions, Hermon Baker, interested in design and theatre, remained. Yone, from Hawaii, studied at the Honolulu Academy of Arts, Hans Hofman School of Fine Arts, New York, and the Universidad Michoacana, Morelia, Mexico. He worked with fashion shows and designed one-of-a-kind clothes. Ruth Asawa's sculpture, created before her national recognition, hangs in the store as a reminder that Yone

designed her dress for the opening reception at New York's Museum of Modern Arts. His dress designs were elegantly simple and accessorized with beads.

During a 37 year metamorphosis, Yone Inc. became the first real bead store where customers could see, handle and select loose beads from one cent to \$125 for an antique Venetian bead more than 100 years old. Yone supplies beads to third generation clients and was the catalyst for numerous customers who opened their own bead stores. Formerly, the bead buyer selected from a chart in an agent's office, surely an ungratifying experience. Part of the joy of beads is their tactility.

Entering Yone's for the first time, an awesome inventory of 8,000 to 10,000 separate types of beads is intimidating. The atmosphere is quiet, save for beads clinking into compartmented trays as customers intently make selections. Occasionally, the dazzling array overwhelms a newcomer. Mr. Baker gently assists and makes suggestions. He may advise that the necklace should contain quiet "restful" beads to set off interesting, colorful ones. Books and pamphlets are available to help the inexperienced designer.

Every centimeter of wall and ceiling space is used and a large, ornate, gilded mirror is almost obscured by strings of beads. Atop showcases are trays filled with beads and more compartmented trays, each clearly priced.

Creative, colorful . . . confusing? A staggering inventory problem? On the contrary. Merchandise is arranged by number and alphabetical letter, similar to a library with millions of books. From floor to ceiling the walls are lined with small boxes of beads, each with a number or letter and a sample bead on the front.

Less and less really good glass beads are available. They take time to make, artisans have died, and contemporary artists make more money from art glass vases and bowls. Single beads are only a sideline. Beads from Austria are unusual and expensive. Silver beads from Sri Lanka and Thailand, often copies of ancient native designs, are up to \$30 each.

Yone's name (pronounced "yo-nay") in Japanese, means "rice." Hermon Baker was named after the Holy Land's highest mountain, Mt. Hermon. Two dichotomous-sounding names. Yet, these creative men, for many years . . . perhaps nebulously, have steadily and quietly brought pleasure to myriad lives by providing unusual wares and a world class collection of beautiful beads.

— June 1990, Helen von Ammon



yonebee.com

Hello to the Future Goodbye to the Past

This is Mr. Bee in the 60's before Yone became Yone Beads. Now with a developing web site, Yone becomes yonebee.com

maybe it's time to remind old customers and new ones that Yone is not forever, and that Mr. Bee is older and has had time to think of the future

Yone Beads is having its first and last sale. In February and March all sales at the San Francisco store will be 10% off. This is over and above the 19% off by the dozen and 30% off on larger sales.

If you and I are encouraged by this sale, a larger discount may be possible in April. There is a lot of wonderful and unique beads and treasures to share with you, as long as they last.

There will be room in the future for Ethnic Archive.

Hello - Goodbuy



yonebee

The Bead Blog

(under development)

Ethnic Bead Archive

best buy artifacts, beads and collectibles

A Beehive of Beads

a selection
good buy beads
in limited quantities

(under development)

Yone Beads

for those who desire beautiful, unusual, and unique beads. my better buy beads

(under development)

questions?
toll free 1-877-986-1424
facsimile 1-415-989-5742

Yone Beads
478 Union Street
San Francisco, CA 94133

Open 12:30 to 5:30 every day
except Wednesday and Sunday
and by appointment.

erles

we the beads

rchive for August, 2007

eads for Everyone

ednesday, August 15th, 2007



From the first year the policy at Yone Beads was to make them available for everyone. People could walk in off the street, see the selection, and pick out the special beads that interested them. Some of the leading people in beads and bead design today came around. Beads were new, but bead lovers knew what to do with them.

be able to touch and select what you wanted was a novelty. Here is an example of a mindset in the bead business at that time. A New York wholesaler of beads paid me a visit. He was horrified, almost insulted by what he saw. "You let them handle the beads! They must be stealing you blind." Also a well known local shoplifter complained, "You're pathetic" she said, "it's too easy to steal from you." We were lucky. Our customers were happy to pay for the beads. They were not ordinary beads.

very good customer was a young woman who spent most of her welfare check on beads. She made wonderful things out of the beads and was able to support herself and her two children in this way. Her ingenuity really paid off. She eventually sold her work at big stores all around the country, made her fortune, and later told her story on the Oprah Winfrey show. My customer was an example of what a bead lover can do then and do today.

ow everyone seems to be into beads, but bead lovers are as few now as they were then. They lead and do not follow. To create rather than to copy is a talent that few have. The range of beads is so extensive. It is impossible to stock everything in a small store like Yone Beads. The solution is to transfer most of the stock to the internet, and specialize in beads that you don't find everyday. Beads of value that I like and hope you will too.

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"This is not a bead store"

ednesday, August 15th, 2007



After so many years in the glass bead game, it hit me, "This is Not a Bead Store." I'm not selling beads, I'm helping people find solutions. Beads are the way to go. When people are beading, problems go away. When they bead, the pain disappears. BEAD NIRVANA.

Of course I sell beads, who doesn't these days. Not just any beads though, not this source for beads. I carry things you are not likely to find in the usual bead store. People come to me for beads they can't find elsewhere. They love beads and they instinctively know where to find them. I guess you might call that bead radar.

Since the summer of love 40 years ago, when the bead phenomenon began, I was there when "love beads" were all the rage. That was then. Now beads have become too ubiquitous and almost too common. The love of beads is very ancient. Is it now too late in the game to lose that love? About the earliest development in the history of mankind was the use of beads to count, identify, to adorn and, ultimately now, a way of making money.

the source for lovers searching for that very special bead, it is no longer practical to maintain a traditional storefront. To celebrate my presence on the internet, transform yone beads into yonebee, I will make the wide range of my extensive collections available to those who have not been lucky enough to visit in Francisco and be able to say "Now this is a Bead Store!"

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r. Bee

ednesday, August 15th, 2007

ce upon a time a young man called Yonemitsu Arashiro (Yone to you) opened a very unusual store on Union Street in San Francisco. In the years before the "Summer of Love" and "Love Beads", he and Sue Wilson designed very special clothing for unusual people. Yone's sister Sueko modeled the clothes. The store was called Sueko in those days. This is where Mr. Bee came onto the scene.

Wilson eventually left to go East. Then Yone discovered Peking glass beads and the beads took over they do with bead lovers. Later, Sue passed away. The name of the store was changed to Yone. A worldwide selection of beads was the result. After Yone's death 14 years ago, I became the bead man. Bee carried on in San Francisco and now on the internet.





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's All About the Beads

ednesday, August 15th, 2007



Mr. Bee has this thing about Love Beads. They say it's about love, but it's really about the beads. Back to the 60s the bead generation discovered love and beads. The 80s were about money, now it's babies. We seem to be back to love again. My customers bring in their children and even grandchildren. Recently one woman said this is where mommie bought her beads when she was a hippie!

Back in those carefree days they made love beads and gave them to each other. Now nothing seems free. Everything costs money now. We seem to forget about the love part. Back in the 60s they were sharing. Now we are just coping. Instead of creating, most are just copying. Today people are either homeless or they're living the hip style. Now you have to have money to be hip ♦

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[Beads](#)

ednesday, August 15th, 2007

ave your beads, love yourself, love everybody.

the 60s are still here, maybe even still relevant. Everybody just got a little older, maybe a little less lovely. What's wrong with love, beauty? Love your beads. Maybe they will love you. The beads you wear or collect. You might even use your beads. They are such things as rosaries, malas. You might use your beads, maybe even say a prayer. It might be later than you think. Boy are beads beautiful. Look at those beads, meaning in beads. Beads are where everything began. How about that? Beads are more than just a fad for frustrated bead freaks. Try utility, not futility. What's wrong with bead crazy?

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Love the Beads

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